DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 241 907 CS 007 545

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TITLE	Guidelines for Reviewing Reading Program Evaluations.
INSTITUTION	International Reading Association, Newark, Del.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	84
GRANT	NIE-G-80-0075
NOTE	16p.; Developed by the Study of Reading Program Evaluations Committee of the International Reading Association.
AVAILABLE FROM	International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Rd., P. O. Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714 (Order No. 738, $1.00 member, $1.50 non-member).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Guides; *Check Lists; *Evaluation Criteria; Evaluation Methods; *Guidelines; *Program Evaluation; Reading Consultants; Reading Instruction; *Reading Programs; *Self Evaluation (Groups)

ABSTRACT

Developed and field tested by a committee of the International Reading Association, these guidelines are intended to help school personnel preview plans for an internal evaluation of a reading program and judge the quality of an external evaluation after it has been completed. The guidelines include five sections that correspond to the major components of an evaluation report: (1) purpose(s) of evaluation, (2) focus of the evaluation, (3) procedures followed in the conduct of the evaluation, (4) sources of information used in the evaluation, and (5) conclusions. Each section begins with a short introduction, followed by a checklist of declarative statements that cover broadly all aspects of a program evaluation. (HOD)

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ED241907

Guidelines For Reviewing Reading Program Evaluations

Edited by
Michael D. Beck and Mary Seifert
for the
Study of Reading Program Evaluations Committee
International Reading Association

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Introduction

Evaluation of educational programs and materials has become an integral aspect of today's schools. School-based evaluations have been a topic for study and research at least since the 1920s; and evaluation procedures have been evolving since then. A school-based evaluation is a major undertaking. It must be carefully planned, conducted, interpreted, and utilized. Since the purpose of such an evaluation is generally to examine the effectiveness of a particular program or instructional materials, local school personnel must be sure that the evaluation itself has merit. The procedures used, data included, and conclusions reached in the evaluation must be appraised. The following Guidelines were developed to assist individuals in interpreting an evaluation report.

Background

In 1978, the International Reading Association (IRA) organized a Committee on the Study of Reading Program Evaluations. This Committee had as its primary charge to develop "criteria to be used to judge the adequacy of the evidence to support the superiority of a particular reading program...." The Committee developed a set of Guidelines for reviewing evaluation reports. This work was intended to improve both the understanding of evaluations by school personnel and the interpretation and utilization of such evaluations on a local level. The Committee's work in developing the Guidelines, partially funded by a grant from the National Institute of Education (Note 1), went through three revisions and a field test.

The IRA Committee used the *Standards for Evaluations of Educational Programs, Projects and Materials* (Note 2) and various other evaluation documents as starting points to produce Guidelines specifically concerning evaluations of reading programs. The goal was to evolve a manageable but fairly comprehensive list of Guidelines that could assist non-evaluation specialists assess the adequacy of a reading evaluation report.

After the Committee had decided on a final draft of the Guidelines, they were field tested. School systems were identified which had recently completed or were about to complete a reading program or materials evaluation. Through an invitation to IRA local councils, four school districts were selected (see Note 3). A representative, referred to as the Field Test Coordinator, from each district participated in an orientation and training session with the IRA Committee on the use and implementation of the Guidelines. The coordinators then conducted their own "orientation session" concerning the field test with persons in their district who had an interest in or a responsibility for some aspect of the reading program evaluation. Following this local session, these persons were invited to review independently the draft of the Guidelines. The focus of the review was on how the Guidelines could best be improved in content, organization, scope, or wording. The reviewers were made aware that both fine editorial suggestions, as well as global, philosophical comments, were being sought. The reviewers were asked to make their comments with their own

local evaluation concerns in mind, while remembering that the final Guidelines were to be used with various types of evaluations. The Committee benefitted greatly from the cooperation of these schools and the interactions with the local coordinators.

A total of 22 local personnel (4-7 per field test district) completed a review of the Guidelines and a comments and reaction form. The primary job responsibilities of those people were: 4—classroom teachers, 4—principals, 3—reading teachers, 2—reading coordinators, 2—reading directors, 2—counselors, and 1—superintendent, 1—assistant superintendent, and 1—test director.

Two site visits were scheduled for each field test district, made by an IRA committe member or staff. A committee staff member did not visit the same site twice. The purpose of the two visits was the same: to meet with and interview local people who had participated in the field test review process to obtain their reactions to and suggestions for the Guidelines. Two visits were used since it was likely that somewhat different qualitative evaluations would be obtained if two different people met with the district staff at two different times.

Based on the field test, the Guidelines were revised. This version was sent to 101 selected IRA volunteers, including chairpersons of each of the 48 IRA standing and ad hoc committees and all members of the following committees: Evaluation of Tests, Teacher Education, Studies and Research, and Interpretation and Analysis of NAEP Reading Assessment. Interestingly, and probably not surprisingly, there were several parallels between the ratings during and after the field test. Both sets of respondents saw the Guidelines drafts to be well-organized, comprehensive, useful, and "ideal." Many reviewers indicated that the document would be more (or at least as) useful in planning an evaluation as in interpreting an evaluation already completed. There appeared to be significant improvement in the post-field test Guidelines in terms of readability of the questions. Based on the reactions of this last set of reviewers, the Guidelines were revised for the final time, as they are presented in this booklet.

Use of the Guidelines

The two anticipated uses of the Guidelines are: a) in reviewing plans for an internal evaluation before the evaluation begins—looking for additional components to be considered; and b) in judging the quality of an external evaluation after it has been completed.

The Guidelines include five sections which correspond to major components of an evaluation report. They are: purpose(s) of the evaluation, focus of the evaluation, procedures followed in the conduct of the evaluation, sources of information used in the evaluation, and conclusions. Each section begins with a short introduction, followed by a checklist of declarative statements which cover broadly all aspects of a reading evaluation. The user can check "Yes," "No," or "Not Applicable." For example, a check of "Yes" would indicate that the particular item was considered in planning the evaluation or was present in the evaluation report. A check of "Not Applicable" would indicate that the item did not apply. Responses of "No" to the statements in the Guidelines do not imply weaknesses in the evaluations being reviewed. Even in excellent and comprehensive evaluations, many responses might be "No" depending on the purpose

and scope of the given project. Maximum usefulness of the Guidelines will result if a small group of personnel select the relevant portions of the Guidelines and the entire set is reduced to some limited subset of items especially pertinent locally.

Obviously, there is a multitude of types of evaluations available to school personnel. Such variables as, whether the evaluation is internally or externally conducted; its duration and scope; whether it contains qualitative, quantitative, or both types of data; whether its purpose is to assess ongoing programs or propose revisions, all distinguish various types of evaluations. The Guidelines clearly cannot be equally valuable in interpreting all types of evaluations. However, they are generally applicable to internal and external, short-term and long-term, and quantitative and qualitative formal written evaluations. They should assist local personnel in assessing the content of most of the wide variety of evaluations with which they have frequent contact.

Notes

1. This project was partially supported by the National Institute of Education, Project #NIE-G-80-0075.

2. The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. *Standards for evaluations of education programs, projects, and materials*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981.

3. The field-tested districts and local field test coordinators were: Webster (New York) Central School District, Janice Strege, Reading Coordinator; Rock Falls Township (Illinois) High School, Edward Mulvaney, Reading Specialist; Houghton Lake (Michigan) Community Schools, Ken Roberts, Curriculum/Federal Projects Director; and Downers Grove (Illinois) Grade School District, Ronald Hale, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction.

Guidelines

I. Purpose

The report should provide the reasons for conducting the evaluation. Included should be a statement of why the evaluation was conducted and who decided on the advisability and the purposes of the study.

A. Purpose

A.1. The reason(s) for conducting the evaluation is(are) explicitly stated.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.2. The purpose was recorded before the evaluation took place.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.3. The purpose was communicated to the appropriate concerned groups prior to the evaluation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B. Origination

B.1. The report indicates who originally decided to conduct the evaluation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C. Outcomes

C.1. Probable outcomes of the evaluation are suggested.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.2. Actions that might be taken based on the various possible outcomes were specified in advance.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.3. The report indicates that these possible actions were considered to be realistic and practical.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

II. Focus

The program, project, or the materials evaluated should be described clearly and completely. The description should include such elements as the philosophy, including goals, objectives, and definition of reading; as well as specifics such as time, site, students, personnel, instructional methods, and materials.

A. Focus

A.1. The primary focus of the evaluation is clearly presented.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.2. If a program is being evaluated, the evaluation focuses on all aspects (materials, personnel, methods, etc.) of the program relevant to the purpose(s) of the evaluation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.3. If only selected aspects or portions of the program were studied, the evaluation states how and why these particular portions were selected.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.4. The philosophy of instruction embodied in the program is stated.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.5. A reason is given for conducting the evaluation within the designated time span.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B. Resources

B.1. The expenses of the program have been examined.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.2. The evaluation includes an analysis of how available resources are spent (e.g., texts, support materials, salaries, staff development, library materials, consultants).

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C. Sites

C.1. Building or classroom sites in which the evaluation took place are described in terms of number, representativeness, reasons for selection, etc.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.2. The "program" is essentially identical across sites.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.3. If the program is not identical, the evaluation considers the implications of different conditions.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D. Local Conditions

D.1. Any exceptional local conditions occurring during the evaluation are described. (Examples would be personnel factors such as strikes or firings; physical factors such as facility or start-up problems; or social/community factors such as bond issues or exceptional economic conditions.)

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.2. The potential impact of any exceptional factors is discussed in the evaluation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.3. The descriptions of exceptional factors are clear enough to judge whether the findings might be similar in other context.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.4. The setting in which the evaluation took place provided a realistic picture of the reading program.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.5. If the setting is exceptional, this is accounted for in describing the limitations of the study.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.6. Staff members and students were aware of the evaluation while it was being conducted.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.7. There is discussion of the possibility that awareness of the evaluation significantly altered the program or evaluation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

E. Students

E.1. Relevant characteristics of the students involved (such as sex, age, entry capabilities, or language diversity) are described.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

E.2. Possible effects of student characteristics are analyzed in the evaluation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

E.3. The stability of the group over the period of the evaluation is described.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

E.4. Students at the different sites are "similar" in terms of relevant variables.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

E.5. If the students are not "similar," potential effects of the noncomparability are discussed.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

E.6. The method for determining student comparability is described

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

F. Staff

F.1. The number, role, education, experience, and other relevant characteristics of the staff are presented.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

F.2. The "managerial" or organizational scheme from teacher to supervisor is presented.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

F.3. The staff role in selecting and implementing the reading program is described.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

F.4. Staff involvement in the evaluation is discussed.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

F.5. Feedback was provided to staff concerning the evaluation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

F.6. Feedback procedures (planned or completed) are described.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

G. Instructional Methods

G.1. If instructional methods are being evaluated, these methods are described.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

G.2. A rationale is given for the use of particular instructional methods.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

G.3. The instructional methods used are consistent with the program goals.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

H. Materials

H.1. Materials used in the program and their important characteristics (e.g., length, difficulty, format, previous use, commercial, unpublished) are described.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

H.2. The procedures and personnel involved in developing or selecting the materials are indicated.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

H.3. The materials used were developed for use in comparable situations and with comparable student groups.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

H.4. Procedures for determining the suitability of the materials (e.g., difficulty or interest level) for the students in the program are described.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

H.5. Any changes, adaptations, or use of selected portions of the materials are described.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

H.6. Previous evaluations of these materials in similar settings are summarized or referenced.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

H.7. The materials are consistent with the program goals.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

H.8. Procedures used to determine whether materials are consistent with the program goals are discussed.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

III. Procedures

The procedures and/or experimental design used in the evaluation should be discussed in enough detail so that readers can judge the appropriateness of the conclusions reached. Evaluators should be named, along with a description of how they became associated with the evaluation and their relevant background and experience.

A. Design

A.1. The design of the evaluation is described in sufficient detail to enable its replication.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.2. Limitations of the procedures are identified.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.3. The evaluation includes an analysis of different groups of students (e.g., control and experimental groups, Title I and non-Title I students).

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.4. Program effects are assessed against a control condition of some type.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B. Timeline

B.1. A timeline for the evaluation was established during the planning stages.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.2. The timeline was followed or significant departures are noted and explained.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C. Evaluators

C.1. The evaluators are identified.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.2. The evaluators are regular staff members of the program being evaluated.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.3. A clear description of the role and duties of the evaluators is given.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.4. Reasons for the selection of the evaluators are given.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.5. The evaluators' biases (philosophical or instructional) are noted.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.6. The previous experience of the evaluators with similar types of evaluations is described.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.7. Evidence is presented of the evaluators' expertise in both reading and evaluation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D. External Evaluators

Complete Part D only if all or some of the evaluators were "external"—that is, outside consultants, not regular employees of the district.

D.1. The amount of time the evaluators spent in the district studying the program is specified.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.2. The amount of time spent *in total* on the evaluation is specified.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.3. The evaluators are accessible for follow-up consultation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.4. The report indicates which district personnel had a role in choosing the evaluators.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.5. Evidence of staff and administrator support for the evaluator is presented.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

IV. Information Sources

The report should describe as completely as possible the sources of the information used in the evaluation. Included should be a description of the data generated, as well as the characteristics of instruments or procedures used.

A. Data Collection and Analysis

A.1. Interpretations in the evaluation are based on multiple sources of information — both quantitative and qualitative (e.g., attitude, ability test results; interviews; questionnaires; rating forms; observation protocols).

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.2. The purpose is presented for collecting each set of data.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.3. The meaning of any statistical procedure is discussed.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.4. Qualitative data are included in the evaluation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.5. Summaries are provided of the results of each set of information collected.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.6. Suggestions are made for follow-up data collection to corroborate the results or to analyze long-term trends.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.7. Data were collected from various involved groups (e.g., students, teachers, parents, various administrators, board of education).

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.8. The time(s) at which data were collected is specified.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.9. The manner in which results are summarized is consistent with both the purposes of the evaluation and the instruments included (e.g., use of a "reading comprehension" test to evaluate a phonics program would be inconsistent).

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

A.10. Evidence is provided of "quality control" in the collection and analysis of the data.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B. Technical Characteristics of the Data

Reliability

B.1. If published instruments were used, reliability data are reported.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.2. Reliability figures were established on groups comparable to those being evaluated.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.3. If not (see B.2.), reliability data are provided for the sample of students used in the evaluation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Apolicable

Validity

B.4. A rationale is provided for the selection and use of the instruments included in the evaluation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.5. Documentation is made of the validity of the instruments used for the purposes they serve in the evaluation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.6. If an achievement test was used, evidence is provided that the test content closely matches that of the instructional program.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.7. If not (see B.6.), other evidence of validity of this instrument is presented.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.8. Any test series used in the evaluation is typically used in the system.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.9. If not (see B.8.), reasons for its use in the evaluation are specified.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.10. For locally developed instruments, evidence is provided of validation procedures for the measure during its construction.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.11. Locally developed instruments were pilot tested before their use in the program.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

V. Conclusions

The conclusions should present the assumptions made in the evaluation. Conclusions need not all be supported by all sets of data collected; nevertheless, all conclusions should be referenced to the supporting data. Conclusions *not* supported by the data should be clearly identified. Finally, a good report concludes with a proposed plan of action for either implementing the recommendations or initiating appropriate follow-up action.

A. Assumptions

A.1. The report contains a list of assumptions made in designing and conducting the evaluation (e.g., it is assumed that the XYZ Reading Test provides an adequate and complete measure of comprehension).

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B. Clarity

B.1. The report clearly states the conclusions reached.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.2. Conclusions reached are limited to the results obtained from the evaluation.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.3. Inconclusive or contradictory findings are clearly indicated.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

B.4. Speculations, generalizations, or interpretations that are not supported by clear results are labeled as such.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C. Validity

C.1. For each conclusion drawn, the supportive evidence—qualitative and/or quantitative—is referenced.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.2. The conclusions follow from what was actually measured or observed.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.3. The conclusions include the reasoning that led to them.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.4. Inconclusive areas are indicated and reasonable interpretation provided for these.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

C.5. Educational, as well as statistical, implications of the results are discussed.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D. Special Issues

D.1. Limitations of the evaluation are presented.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.2. Conflicting points of view concerning the program and the evaluation results are presented fairly.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.3. The report presents objective evidence as to why these views are not considered "correct," without attacking them.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.4. Some assurance is given that the report was not modified to reflect the views of those having vested interest concerning the program.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.5. There is a concrete plan for the dissemination of results of the evaluation to all concerned groups (e.g., students, staff, the public).

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.6. Conclusions are stated in a manner that leads to a plan of action.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.7. Evidence is provided to show that a relevant plan of action has been established.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

D.8. Program staff is aware of the intended implementations of any findings, including new goals, procedures, materials, time-lines, activities, etc.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

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